

K Lover 211

Chapter 211: A Crime

Caius softly closed the door behind him as he noticed she was asleep. The door made a soft click and she stirred, turning slightly, but Rose didn't wake up. It wasn't until she stopped moving again that he realized he had held his breath. He didn't know why he was being quiet.

He walked closer, and he could see Rose's face now. The candle that lay on the bedside table flickered as a light breeze came through the open window. The glow landed on her face, and Caius hovered as he stood beside the bed and just stared.

Her breathing was steady, her long lashes rested gently on her cheeks. Her red hair was spread all over the pillow, and there were a few strands on her face.

Caius moved before he thought about it. He sat on the bed and brushed the strands of hair away from her face. Her freckles littered her cheeks and the bridge of her nose. Caius had to fight the urge to trace a finger over them or rub the back of his palm against the side of her face.

She was dressed in nightclothes, the same type she wore to see him. The light clothes framed her shape as she slept and as he moved closer, he realized she smelled heavenly. Caius took a deep breath as his eyes trailed down her body. He grabbed the sheets and squeezed them before returning his attention to her face. It was either that or he might reach for her.

She was sleeping so peacefully, her breathing steady, and not a single frown appeared on her face. It almost felt like a crime to wake her up. Caius's face softened as he realized it was quiet—there was no sound in his head—and he was content just watching her sleep.

He lifted a hand to touch her face but quickly brought it down, worried that anything he did might break this moment.

Suddenly, Rose's eyes flew open, as though she sensed someone was staring at her while she slept. Her eyes blinked in confusion as she looked up at him. Then, when she recognized him, she bolted upright in horror.

"Your Majesty," Rose cried as she moved to a sitting position.

Her eyes widened in gut-wrenching horror and panic as she realized she had fallen asleep instead of going to the crown prince's room as she had been instructed.

After the sisters had helped her get ready, she had quickly dismissed them and decided to stay in her room for some alone time before heading to the crown prince's chambers. Clearly, she never went there and had fallen asleep instead.

Caius's brows furrowed as she called him. There was panic in her expression, and she looked scared. He couldn't help but notice she hadn't been scared until she realized it was him.

"I am sorry," Rose started to say. "I didn't mean to not go to your bedchambers. I fell asleep," she tried to explain.

She looked around, glancing toward the door. She hadn't even heard him come in. How could she have fallen asleep so easily? After the events of the night, she had been exhausted and especially relieved to be in her room without ever running into the Queen.

The Queen was one of the reasons she didn't want to spend another moment in the dress. It was too risky, and Rose didn't think there was a limit to what the Queen could do to her. For something so disrespectful, the Queen might demand her head—even though it was not her fault.

"I can see that," Caius said coldly as his eyes studied her face. "I recall telling Thomas to put you in my bedchambers."

"This isn't his fault," Rose quickly said. "I didn't want to..." She paused, unsure of how to explain herself. "I wanted to clean up."

Caius lifted her chin. Rose's eyes met his briefly, but she quickly looked away. It felt a little too intense—almost like she was laid bare for him to see all of her. Why was he in her room? If he had noticed she wasn't in his bedchambers, he could have sent for her. He didn't have to come here himself.

There was an overbearing presence to Caius, especially when he was this close. She could smell the wine on him—but that wasn't the only thing, there was also a familiar intoxicating scent. And it didn't help that he had called for her tonight. Something told her it wasn't to play chess.

Rose's breath hitched as he just held her chin in place. She could tell he hadn't looked away from her face even once. He noticed even the slightest movement she made.

Her throat suddenly felt dry, and her body started to grow warm—even the little breeze that slipped in through the windows didn't help. Rose almost punched herself as a flash from the day before appeared in her head. Her hands were against the door and the crown prince was behind her.

"What are you thinking about?"

It was like being hit with a log of wood. Rose jerked her head up, finally meeting his eyes. She shut them immediately, worried that her eyes might show him exactly what she had been thinking about.

Caius chuckled at her reaction, and his face moved closer. "It's a shame," he whispered, his lips grazing her lips. "I wanted to take the dress off you myself."

Rose's eyes flew open just as the crown prince took her lips in a gentle kiss. Caius teased her with his lips before slowly pushing his tongue into her mouth.

Rose gave in, kissing him. He grunted into her lips, and she could hear the deep breath he took just before he deepened the kiss. He pushed her against the bed until she was lying on her back.

A hand locked one of her hands on the bed while the other moved to her chest grabbing her bosom and he gently squeezed. He rubbed against her nipple poking through the silk dress, and Rose lifted her back off the bed as she moaned against his lips.

His lips silenced her moans, and his hard chest against hers was more exhilarating than crushing. Rose squirmed under him, unsure of what she wanted—unsure of whether she should even accept it.

Chapter 212: Breathless

With every touch, Rose felt her body grow hotter, and her senses became more muddled. Her thoughts were harder to grasp, and the deeper the kiss got, the fewer constraints she had. The kisses were invasive, but there was a softness to them. Rose's hand moved to the side of his face, cupping it as she kissed him back.

Caius broke the kiss, and Rose opened her eyes to see him staring at her. His pupils were dilated, making his irises look smaller than normal. Her chest rose and fell as she tried to catch her breath while he slowly leaned back to a sitting position. Her hand dropped to the bed, but she didn't stop looking at him, and neither did he.

Caius was still dressed in his full attire for the ball; he hadn't taken a single piece of clothing off before he came to seek her. His eyes darkened as he stared at her up and down. He didn't have the patience to take anything off. Perhaps it was a good thing she had spared him the trouble of taking off her dress—he might have ended up slicing it off with his sword.

Rose could see the lust in his eyes as he watched her lie on the bed. His hand moved to her legs, and he slowly started to lift her dress while still locking eyes with her. Rose jerked—his glove felt weird against her bare skin, a little cold, she was used to his warm hands.

Rose grabbed his hand on her thigh and lifted it so she could see. The crown prince gave her an odd stare, but he didn't stop her; rather, he looked curious as to what she was about to do.

Rose tried to take off the leather glove, but it didn't budge easily. She moved his hand closer to her face and bit into the tip of his finger, making sure it was just the leather. She moved her head backward while supporting it with her fingers to take off his glove.

It came undone, and Rose felt some accomplishment—but that quickly died when she looked at Caius. There was a dark, almost sinister look in his eyes, and Rose could tell immediately that she might have bitten off more than she could chew—literally.

Caius's eyes flared, and she heard the unmistakable sound of his belt coming undone. It was too fast—he undid it with just one hand. However, she didn't fully process it before the crown prince grabbed her by the legs, pulled her downwards so he could easily grab her waist, and lifted her off the bed.

"Your Majesty," Rose cried as she was placed over the crown prince's legs. She was still dressed in her nightdress, and the robe was still on.

He planted her across his legs while he sat on the bed, and Rose had no choice but to straddle him. The first contact was heart-stopping, and she wrapped her arms around his neck to brace herself.

Caius grabbed her exposed rear with his ungloved hand, her dress gathering at her waist. He pushed down, and a soundless scream escaped her lips, her head leaning backward as her body adjusted to accommodate him. She gripped his neck tightly and leaned forward, gasping against his neck.

The familiar feeling of him sliding right in still had the same exhilarating effect, and it left her breathless. Rose wasn't the only one on the verge of undoing. Caius swore as she sat on him, needing more than a moment to recover. He felt her shiver against him, her walls closing in on him—slick and tight. The sensation was enough to drive a grown man mad.

"Fuck!" Caius swore against her before lifting her and slamming her back onto himself.

Rose gasped, and her fingers dug into his back. She bit down on her lips to keep from screaming out, but her hips had a mind of their own, her body already enjoying the sensation of the thrust and pull.

Caius swore again as he lifted her bum, and Rose's arms tightened against him as she braced herself for the sweet feeling. He pressed her down on himself, and she twirled her hips as he was buried deep in her, her moan echoing in the room.

Caius pressed his face against her bosom through the sheer fabric, and she arched her back. She heard a sound and felt pressure on her neck just before the nightdress ripped, exposing her pale breasts and pink pointed nipples to him.

Caius swore and didn't hesitate to take one into his lips. They were locked together, his tongue sucking and tugging while his hands grabbed her behind, squeezing her butt cheeks.

Rose let out an ungodly sound, her hips moving. It was hard to think in this position, and Caius seemed to enjoy torturing her. "Your Majesty," she moaned.

"Hmm," he replied, a nipple between his teeth.

Caius moved to the second and paid as much attention as he did to the first, all the while locking her in place so she couldn't move as she wanted.

"Your Majesty," Rose tried again. She sounded on the verge of tears. "Please."

"Please what?" Caius asked, looking up at her with a bud between his lips.

Rose felt like she might die before she could say the words, but the crown prince looked like he had every intention of having his way, and she would be at his mercy.

"I'd like to move, please," Rose whispered with a flustered expression.

"Like this?" Caius asked, lifting her and slamming her back into him.

"Ohh, Your Majesty," she cried and buried her face in his neck.

Caius swore and kept the movement steady, listening to Rose moan into his ears. It was hard to get control when she sounded like that—gasping, jerking with every movement, and shivering against him.

Suddenly, she dug her fingers deeper into his neck, and her body stiffened. He knew she was close as her words seemed to seize and her body went into a frenzy.

Caius swore as her walls tightened against him, sucking him in. He gripped her waist tightly as he felt himself crash onto the waves. It was a losing fight—not when she was this wet, tight, and responsive.

She shivered some more and convulsed against him. It was hard, it was fast, and she screamed his name as she fell against him, putting all her weight on him. Caius grunted as he poured his seed into her tight space.

Rose heard him grunt once, twice, then everything stopped. Her body felt a little heavy from the aftermath, and her core still throbbed from where they were connected. Caius didn't try to separate them; rather, he held her in that manner for a bit.

She realized she could hear his heartbeat slow down—and hers wasn't slow either. It was beating like it might jump out of her chest. She didn't want to say anything—didn't even know if she should—and it didn't help that Caius just sat unmoving.

However, Rose knew they were far from being done. Knowing the crown prince, he might get even more excited soon enough. The thought had not fully formed in her head when she felt him grow within her.

Rose's eyes flew open, and she sat upright, staring the crown prince right in the face. The latter had a devious smile on, but Rose could feel the panic in her chest.

"Your Majesty," she called.

Caius didn't reply immediately; rather, he popped a nipple into his lips and sucked on it. Rose felt herself waver, and she felt a pleasant sensation spread from where he sucked to the rest of her body.

Caius's hand moved from under her rear to where they joined and pushed a finger in. The space was already too tight—to add a finger was too much for Rose to bear. She tried to protest, but Caius locked her in place with his other hand and his mouth on her lips, so all she could do was rotate her hips—but that only made it worse.

Rose grabbed his shoulders, but that didn't stop him, and no matter how hard she dug, he still wore clothes. Caius finally pulled out his finger, and she gasped in relief—only to have him push in as deep as he could go.

Caius let out a ragged breath, almost a growl, and held her tighter. They were still fully clothed—well, mostly him. Rose's clothes were ripped to shreds at this point. They tangled in intense desire, moving together in a slow, aching rhythm.

Rose moved against him, her body welcoming the intrusion again, and she matched his pace, slowly moving to the rhythm. But something told her it was just for her to get used to him, as Caius was going

to pick it up soon. As soon as she thought this, he slammed right in, and she had to grip him as her whole body shook from the force.

Chapter 213: The Cusp

Rose's breath caught in her throat as her body trembled with each thrust. Her fingers clawed at the crown prince's back through his clothes, desperate for grounding, her lips parted in a cry that resounded in the room.

Their rhythm faltered only slightly when she moaned again, her body tightening up as another climax crept up too soon. Her thoughts frayed at the edges, unable to focus on anything but the molten fire winding in her gut.

"Your Majesty—" she choked, breathless, a plea without words.

He silenced her with a kiss, lips rough and hot against hers, swallowing her sounds completely. Rose closed her eyes as they kissed, pressing against him as she grabbed the back of his head.

Caius moved her hips at a steady rhythm. Rose felt numb from her knees down while the rest of her body was on fire. Her nightdress was hanging on for dear life, and Rose knew if she moved a little, it would all fall off her.

She could feel the tremor in the crown prince's muscles as he held onto her, his fingers tightening against her waist as he clung to the little restraint he had left. One of his hands moved from her waist to trace the curve of her back, moving under her nightdress, while the other had a steady grip on her waist.

Rose's lungs felt empty at the lack of air, but all that didn't matter. The only thing that did was the feeling building up in her gut, and she thrashed about, moving her hips in rhythm as she sought bliss.

Rose gasped against Caius's lips as she found the wave. It took her closer and closer to the edge, and just as she was about to climax, Caius broke the kiss, lifting her off his legs. Rose kicked her legs as she whimpered, the feeling of bliss fading faster than it had arrived.

She groaned in protest and tried to sit back down, but the crown prince didn't give her the chance and placed her on the bed. Rose clamped her legs together and lifted her back off the bed, almost reaching for him.

Rose moved on the bed, the nightdress mangled and twisted. It had been ripped, and rolling about on the bed didn't help. Right now, it covered nothing as her chest was completely exposed to Caius's gaze.

He loomed over her, and without breaking eye contact, took off his clothes. Rose melted under his gaze, and when he finally climbed onto the bed, she wasted no time rushing into his arms.

But Caius spun her so she had her back to him. He locked her arms behind her as she knelt, and he pushed her forward so she had no other choice but to lift her rear into the air.

Rose gasped as her face slammed onto the bed. It didn't hurt as much as it was shocking, and she realized she couldn't even stay upright by herself as the crown prince had her wrists locked together behind her back.

"Your Majesty," she tried to say, but her words didn't get past the sheets.

Caius spread open her legs, and without any warning, impaled her. Rose felt his entrance reverberate through her whole body, and she moaned against the bed, her cries muffled.

Rose felt her head start to spin as Caius thrust against her sensitive spots relentlessly. The sounds of bodies slapping against each other filled the room. All she could do was hang on for the ride that was driving her to the point of insanity.

He had been considerate earlier, there was no doubt about it. Right now, Rose didn't even get the chance to form thoughts. Her face had a constant dazed expression as she was battered with a constant flux of intense pleasure.

Rose shivered as the dam got full again, tempting to burst forth. She groaned, twisting her whole body, but Caius's grip on her was tight. She couldn't even fight him off if she wanted to—not that she wanted to.

Rose was on the cusp, right on it. The pleasure that had built up from before and now crashed onto each other, and Rose spasmed, climaxing so intensely her legs gave out from under her. Caius let go of her wrists and grabbed her waist, holding her up himself.

She could tell it wouldn't be long now, but all she could do was lie there unmoving, her body shaking from the climax. She felt him stiffen a little, then he thrust once, twice, thrice—and then stopped moving.

Rose closed her eyes. She was spent. All she wanted to do was sleep now. It was not only a rough evening but a rough night too. Suddenly, Caius lifted her, and she opened her eyes to see she was lying on his chest—and by the sparkle in his eyes, this was merely a break.

Rose was mortified. She could feel him against her stomach, but she knew better than to be deceived. Soon he would be ready to go again, and he would for even longer this time.

Caius lifted a hand to her face as he studied her. Rose tore her gaze away from him and laid the side of her face on his chest. This was awkward, almost uncomfortable. Now that she wasn't in the throes of passion, she could think again, and every part of her brain was rejecting this.

Caius didn't touch her further before pulling his hand away. He had seen the look on her face when she turned away, and he wondered if she was being shy.

However, this was far from the case, as Rose was convincing herself there was a reason for this. A very important one. And now that she felt she had appeased him to some extent, it was time to make her request. Besides, when he was done with her, he would be out of her room before she would be able to get a word out.

Chapter 214: Personal...

"Your Majesty," Rose started as she got ready to make her request.

"Hmm," Caius replied as Rose broke through his thoughts. He wasn't thinking much—only that he couldn't figure out how he had stayed away for this long and how she didn't weigh much as she lay on his chest. He might even go to sleep in this manner.

Caius kept his eyes closed and his hand moved to her plump rump. He gripped it firmly, enjoying the soft sound it made as his hand made contact. Caius moved her upwards so he could easily access her body—the wet and tight space he had endless thoughts about.

"Your Majesty," Rose called again. She feared the crown prince was not listening, and by the feeling between her legs, he wanted to go again.

Rose already knew she was dealing with a monster, but to be reminded every single time—she didn't think her body could handle it. Her shoulders and wrists hurt a little from where he had grabbed her arms. Nothing too much—they were just sore. And that wasn't the only place that was sore, she could count at least three more.

Caius groaned, and his other hand moved to the side of her waist as if to lift her onto himself. Rose was by no means petite. Her weight also wasn't on the smaller side in comparison to her height, but the crown prince always lifted her like she weighed nothing.

She knew it shouldn't come as a surprise. She could see his muscled arms and could also feel the toned abs beneath her as she lay on his torso. The crown prince was strong, and she was certain all the stories about him were true.

"I need a favor," Rose blurted, and his hand on her waist froze.

Caius slowly opened his eyes, but Rose wouldn't look at him. She kept her face against his chest, trying to listen to his heartbeat as she kept her eyes closed. His heartbeat didn't sound any different from normal, and it almost felt like she had never heard it beat fast—ever.

"What favor?" Caius asked as he gripped her behind tight.

Rose jerked, wondering if she had crossed the line. It was hard to tell when she had pissed him off, as the crown prince was too unpredictable for her. Sometimes, he seemed not to mind her requests, other times, it was the opposite.

"I would like to—" But Rose didn't finish the rest of her words before he lifted her and placed her right on his erection. Rose's eyes nearly popped out of her skull. Of course, he was already hard again. That shouldn't come as a surprise anymore.

"Sit up," Caius commanded. His voice didn't have the drawl it did—rather, it sounded detached, cold even.

"Your Majesty," she whispered as she moved to obey his instructions.

She pushed on his chest and Caius pressed down. Rose groaned as he penetrated as deeply as he could go. She planted her hand on his chest for support. After all the friction, she was quite sensitive.

One of his hands moved from her buttocks to her stomach. "Depending on your performance, I might agree or disagree."

Rose's eyes flew open immediately. However, compared to his voice, the crown prince didn't seem all that cold—it was quite the contrary. His brown eyes glimmered, and they seemed to be recording every inch of her.

His hand moved upward, slightly caressing; soon it came to the space between her bosom, and Caius grabbed one. He pinched a swollen bud and Rose jerked.

"You didn't answer," he said, staring hard at her.

"Yes, Your Majesty," Rose whimpered. He had just been sucking and biting on that a moment ago.

She pressed her palm against his chest and lifted her bum, bringing it back down. Caius's hand on her nipple froze, and he stared at her with a slightly dazed expression. Rose started slow, but she knew she'd have to pick up the pace if she didn't want to spend all night here.

Caius smirked and moved his hands away from her. He placed them under his head, using them to support it as he watched her. Rose tasted horror and her rhythm faltered a little. The crown prince intended to leave it all in her hands.

"What favor?" he asked as she bobbed up and down. The smirk was still on his face, but his eyes exuded unfiltered desire. "I won't repeat myself again."

Rose moaned as she forced herself to speak. Perhaps it was because she was moving herself, but it seemed to be working—and it didn't help that Caius was watching her every move. Why was that... exotic?

"Edna is getting m-married tomorrow, ngh." Rose paused as her hips moved up and down. She had to remind herself to stay on the path. "I'd like..." Rose paused again as her moans got louder.

Caius didn't blink. He enjoyed every bit of the spectacle in front of him. Rose rotated her hips. At first, it had been to try to please him, but somewhere along the line, her movements became haphazard—and by the look on her face, she was the last thing on his mind.

"Your Majesty," Rose cried as she rolled her hips. "Ohh. I'd like to attend the wedding. Aaah! The wedding, please let me..." She grabbed her chest and squeezed.

Caius felt her walls contract and she spasmed before falling forward while panting for breath. Her mouth was partly open, and he could hear how hard her heart was beating.

"Who said you could use me as your personal cock and climax before your prince? You've got some nerve, Rose," Caius said but he sounded more amused than angry.

Caius lifted her head from his chest and kissed her hard on the mouth. Rose kissed him back—she was spent and could barely believe she had just done that. She would have sworn there was nothing more to squeeze out. However, once she had started, she couldn't stop, and she could see the clear approval in Caius's eyes. He enjoyed the show. Perhaps that had encouraged her.

Suddenly, Caius rolled her onto her back, moving hard between her legs. She gasped against his lips—but of course, he didn't care about her.

Rose heard the sound of knocking. She groaned, turning on the bed as she protested against it. She didn't want to wake up—not yet. She had not been asleep for long before the knocking started. She ignored it, her body falling right back to sleep so easily.

Another knock, another quickly followed, and another—but Rose didn't even stir. She slept peacefully; the sounds of the knocks no longer reached her ears.

Chelsy looked worriedly at her sister as they both stood outside the door of Rose's room. This was a little strange, as Rose was usually quick to respond to their knocks.

It was time for breakfast, and they were even a little late, as this morning was hectic for the maids and every servant. Most lords didn't leave after the ball, especially those who had arrived a day or two earlier, which meant breakfast was even rowdier, as a few lords and ladies would be getting ready to leave.

This also meant that Rose was still stuck with the sisters, as the other maids were too busy. And regardless of the crown prince's orders, Rose was still a peasant. To treat a lord or lady as lesser than her would be insulting.

"Should I knock again?" Isla asked in response to her sister's stare.

"I don't know," Chelsy whispered.

"I am worried," Isla said.

"Me too," Chelsy replied, turning her attention to the door. "I have no choice but to open it. We'll deal with the consequences together, right?"

Isla took a moment to nod, but she didn't counter what her sister had just said. Her body grew tense as Chelsy moved to open the door. They half expected it to be locked, but it opened easily. Chelsy shared a look with her sister before pushing the door and walking in.

Chelsy stepped in first, then Isla. Isla tried to close the door with her back, but she was too nervous and ended up slamming it harder than necessary. The loud sound jerked Rose from her slumber.

She woke up suddenly, completely disoriented as she tried to get her bearings. The first thing she noticed was Chelsy and Isla staring at her with horror and concern clearly written on their faces as they stood right in front of her bed with trays in their hands.

Rose rubbed her eyes as she forced herself to wake. She moved to a sitting position, wondering why they were just standing there, staring at her like that. However, as she sat upright, she realized she was dressed in nothing but the ripped nightdress.

The covers didn't do a proper job of hiding her completely, and Rose immediately pulled them upwards to cover herself. She held them to her chest and lifted her head to look at the sisters.

"Were you attacked by a wild animal?" It was Isla who spoke first. Her words snapped Chelsy out of it, and she dropped the tray she held at the end of the bed and quickly rushed closer to Rose.

"Are you okay?" she cried.

"I am," Rose said with a sigh. How was she supposed to explain this to the girls?

"What happened?" Isla asked. "We were knocking and you didn't respond."

Rose closed her eyes. She knew they were just worried, not nosy. Besides, all the questions seemed to be coming from Isla; Chelsy just looked at her with concern.

"I was just tired. Thank you for bringing my breakfast."

"Do you need assistance getting ready?" Chelsy asked.

Rose lifted her head to look at the teenager. She stood beside the bed, her wide, gentle eyes looking at Rose. Her expression showed that all she wanted to do was help.

Rose smiled softly at her. "I'm really fine. I just overslept. I don't need help getting ready."

This was wrong. Rose didn't oversleep—she had barely gotten any sleep the night before because of a certain person. And she wasn't fine; she was sore all over. Her shoulders hurt, and there were red marks all over her chest, her back, and most likely her behind.

She closed her eyes in embarrassment. She could imagine the scene, and there was sufficient reason for both sisters to stare at her as though she had been mauled. The crown prince didn't hold back in the slightest.

"Are you sure?" Chelsy pressed. Her younger sister had also moved closer, and they were both staring at Rose with concern.

Rose almost palmed her face. The crown prince couldn't have tried to make this look less like she had been attacked by some wild animal. She feared she might have traumatized the girls.

Rose wasn't surprised he wasn't in her room, she had expected nothing less. She also didn't even know when she fell asleep, and by the way her body felt, she needed to wash up immediately.

"I am," Rose replied, looking up at them. "Last night was just a rough one. As soon as I clean up, I'll be right as rain."

Rose gathered the covers and started to get out of bed, but she didn't make it out of the before she sat back down. She might need to eat first.

"We can help you clean up," Isla offered.

Rose didn't need help getting ready. What she needed help with was the sheets. She missed the older maids who knew exactly what was going on. At least they wouldn't ask her too many questions and would immediately get to work.

"The sheets," Rose whispered. "I need them changed." And washed. But she didn't add the last part. She was hoping they would figure that out on their own.

"At once," Isla replied, rounding to the other side so she could help take out the sheets.

Rose forced herself to stand, and this time she didn't feel the dizziness she had the first time she tried. She also recalled she hadn't really eaten much the night before and coupled with the activities after, it was no surprise she felt this way.

She held the covers tight as she stepped away from the bed. Chelsy looked like she might help her, but when she saw that Rose didn't need her help, she withdrew her hands and concentrated on taking out the sheets on the bed.

Rose smiled tightly at them before she walked away. She didn't take off the covers until she was out of sight. When Rose returned to the bedchamber after washing up, the room was empty and the bed bare.

Rose got dressed quickly, not missing that the sisters had placed her food on the table. She didn't have a lot of options for clothes. Right now, the only dresses she had were the one Bailey had mended for her and the one she wore to the ball the night before. Of course, that was completely out of the question. The Queen would have her head.

She spun a little as she inspected it. It really was well done. She could even wear this to the wedding. As soon as she thought about this, Rose panicked immediately. She could clearly recall that the crown prince hadn't said a single thing about her request.

She froze. Did that mean he wasn't satisfied with her performance? Rose cringed as she thought about it. She hugged herself and walked toward the table. He did say she could go anywhere, but she really couldn't without permission.

Rose realized she was mentally and emotionally exhausted. It was pretty hard, pretending this was her life now. As much as she tried to act accordingly, a huge part of her was hoping the crown prince would let her go. But would Ander be willing to take her back?

Rose felt soiled. She avoided thinking about it and instead just kept one foot in front of the other. She paid attention to the little comforts, as she couldn't deal with the things staring her in the face.

She pulled the tray to herself as she began to eat, but the food felt dry. It was hard to place exactly why she felt like this right now, but she suspected Edna's wedding might have something to do with it.

She shouldn't go. It would be too painful. But at the same time, she didn't want their farewell to be in this manner, and maybe being away from the castle—even if it was brief—was what she needed. To pretend that she was a little free might help the rest of her stay feel a little easier.

She was halfway through her meal when the sisters came back with clean sheets. They smiled at her as soon as they saw her dressed, and Rose feared that Chelsy might try to hug her—but the latter just nodded toward her and got to work.

When they were done, they said their goodbyes and left with the empty dishes, as Rose was done with her meal. She smiled tightly as she watched them leave, not saying anything.

She had thought to ask if Mister Henry had sent any message, but Rose doubted they would keep it from her. If there was a message for her, she knew she wouldn't need to ask before the sisters would inform her.

The only person who would have information she wasn't supposed to have was Welma. Rose nearly jumped out of her chair as she remembered the maid. She didn't know what had transpired after the crown prince took her away. What if...

Rose didn't get the chance to complete the thought before a loud knock rang out. She jerked, almost falling off the chair, but she recovered quickly and rushed for the door.

Chapter 216: Is That So?

Rose opened the door gently, contrasting to the turmoil she felt inside. Her face was expressionless, giving nothing away. She brushed some hair away from her face as she opened the door and looked up to see who had knocked.

The knight, Thomas stood only about three feet away from the door. He was dressed impeccably, and his short light brown hair was parted at the side and styled. Rose looked up at him with wide green-hazel eyes.

"Lord T'omas," she said, taking a step closer as she peered at his face, shocked to see him in this manner.

She had seen him the night before at the ball, but she hadn't paid attention—mostly because he avoided her gaze the entire time. He still wore his usual knight uniform, but something about his appearance seemed different as though he might have dressed for an occasion instead of duty. Rose couldn't quite put her finger on it.

"Rose," he said curtly, immediately taking a step back, his expression stern, the color on his cheeks disappearing as soon as it had appeared.

It was hard to say if it was because of seeing her or because of the way she called his name. She knew he hated it, and she would often randomly call his name like that.

"What brings you 'ere?" she asked, looking up at his face with a smile. Somehow, seeing his stuck-up expression was comforting and she almost forgot the earlier feeling she had.

He glared down at her, but Rose didn't back down. She was certain something about him had changed. She didn't know when, but Thomas wasn't as hostile as he used to be.

"What are you talking about?" He sounded irritated. "I'm here on the crown prince's order, by your request!" He glared at her.

Rose's eyes widened as she realized. "The wedding," she blurted out, a little too excitedly.

She could scarcely believe her ears, even though a part of her couldn't help but think this was a bad idea. Still, she couldn't help the excitement. It also meant that the crown prince had given her permission to leave for the wedding.

Rose couldn't figure out why that made her happy, but when an animal had been caged for a long time, even something as little as this would feel grand. She was not only going into the capital but could freely attend Edna's wedding.

Thomas stared at her with disdain and stepped to the side, avoiding her gaze again. "I do not know, but you are to leave the castle, and I am to accompany you!" he said angrily. "I am not some wench's guard."

Even though he had said this under his breath, it was still loud enough for Rose to hear—and anyone standing close enough. Rose knew he couldn't go against the crown prince's words, and even when he hated her, she was never scared of him. Now, she was scared of him even less.

"Ave you ever been to a wedding before?" she suddenly asked.

Thomas jerked his head up at her, clearly shocked at her odd question. Their eyes met briefly, and Thomas turned away. Recently, it was hard to look her in the face, and he had refused to think about why that was. He decided it was because she was a rude peasant woman who kept staring at him with such intense eyes. She didn't know how to act and would casually speak to a lord like himself.

"Are you ready?" he asked instead, ignoring her question. "Or better still, if you've changed your mind about going to this stupid function, you can go back to your room I will inform the crown prince right away."

Of course, the vile way he spoke wouldn't change overnight. "I am ready," Rose said with the brightest smile she could muster. "I am very glad Lord Thomas is going out of his way to help someone like me when you have far more important things to do. Thank you."

Thomas looked stunned, and for a couple of moments, he forgot how to speak. Then his gaze darkened. "Whatever!" he yelled. "Let's go."

Rose tried her best to hold back her laughter; she knew that was not the best thing to do. Thomas was so easy, it was almost laughable.

"Do you know where?" she asked.

Thomas's expression darkened even more, and he looked at her with something akin to anger—but it was hard to tell; Thomas always looked angry. "Of course not. Don't you?"

If Rose could, she would have smacked him. How could he ask such a thing? She had never left the castle willingly, and when it happened, it certainly wasn't for a tour. The whole point of asking the crown prince was so she could avoid all this.

"I don't know 'ow to say this, Lord Thomas," Rose started. She kept her voice soft, even though she fully intended to be insulting. "But I 'aven't been in the capital for long, and even then, I 'ave only stayed in the castle. Wouldn't you be the one to 'ave this information? You are more familiar with the capital than I am."

Thomas glared at her. "Why would I know where a maid lives?" he asked. "I was simply asked to watch over you during your time outside the castle. I do not care where you intend to go. If you do not even know where you're supposed to go, then it is best you stay behind."

Thomas turned his back on her and actually looked like he was going to walk away. Rose couldn't fault him. It had only just occurred to her that she only wanted to go to the wedding—she didn't know where it was or whether she was invited. But it was too late now. If she didn't go, she might regret it.

"Lord Thomas," she cried, shutting the door as she rushed after him. There was nothing else she needed to take from her room. She wished she had some gift for Edna, but it was even a miracle that she could attend.

"I apologize for the rude question," she said as she stepped in line with him. "Mister 'Enry should know, and perhaps..." Rose paused. Thomas didn't seem like he was listening, he just kept walking.

When she stopped talking, he didn't turn to look at her, nor did he tell her to stop following him. They walked down the stairs, and Rose hoped she would see someone she was familiar with so she could ask.

Thomas seemed to pay her no mind. He just walked on with his chest in the air, and occasionally he would acknowledge the greetings of the servants and guards they passed.

"Where are we going?" she asked.

No response.

Rose sighed and grabbed her dress as she kept going after him. Thomas was a spoiled brat who could be a little too much to handle.

Thankfully, the front doors soon appeared, and Rose turned her gaze to him. If he didn't know where they were going, where was he planning to take her?

"Rose," a voice called. "Lord Thomas."

Rose turned in time to see Mister Henry, and beside him was Lily. They were only a few feet away from the door, standing in the great entrance room.

"Mister 'Enry," Rose said with glee, walking toward them. Her eyes fell on Lily, who was holding a basket of fruits.

Thomas scoffed, but he willingly stood as Rose rushed toward them. "Mister 'Enry," she called again when she was close enough. "Lily"—her tone was much colder. Lily didn't say anything; she didn't even look at Rose.

"I was worried we wouldn't catch you in time," Mister Henry said, sounding breathless as he started to speak. "Here," he said, taking the basket from Lily and giving it to Rose. "For Edna. We all wish her a blissful marriage."

Rose's eyes widened a little, and she accepted the basket without complaint. "Thank you so much," she said, holding the basket close to her chest.

"No, thank you for wanting to attend. At least one of us should have," Mister Henry said and shook his head. "You should hurry. At this point, you might miss the start. I hear it begins by mid-morning."

Rose nodded. "Thank you," she said again. "But there's a problem. I do not know where the wedding will take place."

Mister Henry paused, clearly confused. He glanced at Thomas, who was standing in the corner with a bored expression on his face. Rose followed his gaze, but neither expression told her anything.

"The carriage will take you there. The coach knows exactly where you're to go. You have no reason to worry."

Rose's mouth nearly fell to the ground. "Is that so?" she asked loudly enough to reach Thomas's ears. Did he really not know? Or had he been messing with her? She found it hard to believe Thomas could make a joke—and if that was what it was, it was a really tacky one.

"Yes," Mister Henry said with conviction.

"Very well. I will make sure she gets this," she nodded to both of them and turned to leave.

"Rose." Lily finally spoke.

Chapter 217: To The Wedding

Rose walked down the front stairs of the castle with a tight grip on the fruit basket, which she kept on her palms instead of holding it by the handle. There was a carriage at the foot of the stairs. It wasn't the only carriage, but she could tell this was the one she was supposed to use.

The carriage wasn't as decorative as the one that had brought her to the castle with the crown prince, but it didn't seem like a regular carriage either. Unlike the others, it had the crest of the royal family.

The horses were brown with long manes, and the coachman was dressed in a simple tunic with a belt around it, some loose pants, and a flat cap on his head. He was seated in the carriage, ready to go.

A few servants and guards were on the stairs, most bowing at Thomas. Some other lords were also leaving the castle, and Rose noticed more than one person stopped to stare. A lady even stopped midway through entering her carriage just to stare at Rose.

She could already hear whispers but was unsure if they came from the servants or the lords and ladies. Rose didn't have the guts to look. She just wanted to get into the carriage and be out of here. She could guess what they were saying, and a few words floated to her ears.

"Is that the whore?"

"I heard she was at the ball."

"I don't recall seeing her."

"Using the royal carriage. How dare she?"

"The crown prince has allowed this long enough."

Rose's grip on the basket tightened as she walked closer to the carriage. By the door stood a guard. He didn't look very happy to open the door for her as she approached, but Thomas was right behind her, and from the looks of things, the knight was going to join her in the carriage.

The door finally opened, and Rose tried to rush in, wanting to quickly get away from the stares and whispers, but she lost her footing. She fell face-first, her head about to slam right onto the floor of the open carriage. It didn't help that her hands were filled with the basket—there was no way she could save herself or the basket. Rose closed her eyes as she braced for the crushing impact.

Suddenly, she felt a hand on her shoulder, and she was pulled back. Thomas was quick to grab her, but that wasn't enough, as Rose had completely lost her footing. Reacting quickly, he moved his other hand, grabbing her waist from behind and pulling her backward onto himself.

"Thank you," Rose cried once she could finally stand on her own feet. She was beyond relieved. She hadn't let go of the basket, so it didn't fall, and surprisingly, not a single fruit fell out of it.

Thomas pulled his hand away from her and stepped back as though Rose had burned him. He didn't respond—not that Rose was expecting anything else. She paid more attention as she tried to get into

the carriage again. It would be easier if she had gotten some assistance while trying to board, but that was clearly not going to happen.

Rose stepped in, sat down, and let out a breath. Other than the slight pain in her shoulder from his grip and the fact that she was a little shaken from almost falling, she was fine.

If Thomas hadn't helped her so quickly, she would have been in trouble. The guard who stood by the door didn't even flinch when he saw her start to fall. She was grateful—if Thomas had waited even for a moment, she would not only have fallen but also gotten badly injured.

Rose placed the fruit basket at her feet and lifted her head in time to see Thomas get into the carriage and sit right in front of her. It was a two-seater carriage. The seats were cushioned, and there were red curtains on all sides. The curtains matched the color of the seats.

"Thank you," Rose said again, worried that he might not have heard her.

Thomas looked toward the curtains and parted them, letting some more light into the cozy carriage. Simultaneously, the carriage started to move, and they shook a bit, her body swaying with the movement. It wasn't uncomfortable, and the cushioned seat helped.

Rose found herself looking out the window. She watched the carriage move down the path leading to the front gates. Her eyes followed the path, resting on the trees and well-trimmed bushes on the sides.

She was leaving the castle—even if it was just for a brief moment, it was still nice. Rose smiled despite herself, and she was still smiling when they went through the gates and over the drawbridge.

She looked away from the window to see Thomas staring at her face. At her gaze, he pretended to look past her, and she smiled again. It felt a little odd not to have any conversation, but watching the road as the carriage moved was enough to distract her.

Rose didn't know how long it would take to get to Edna's wedding, as she didn't know where it was, but she figured it couldn't be that long.

Thoughts of Edna reminded her of the conversation with Lily. Rose's palms turned to fists as she looked out the window. It wasn't anything bad, but Rose couldn't help but feel a little angry.

"Rose," Lily had said. "Would you please give my blessings to Edna?"

All Rose had done was nod at her words and then turn around to leave. Surely, it was something Lily could tell Edna herself. She didn't need to send Rose. The ball was over, and even if the maids were that busy, surely, they wouldn't miss one maid for a quarter of a day. Chelsy and Isla were there to cover up, but Rose didn't say any of this as she walked out of the castle.

The ride to the wedding was a little bumpy, but other than the unavoidable sway of the carriage, Rose had no other complaints. It was a pleasant ride, and all she could do was stare out the window as the carriage rode on.

The capital of Velmount was more magnificent than she had thought. There was a huge statue at the center of the city square. Rose could not believe she had missed it the two times she had gone to and from the castle, but there was a reasonable explanation.

The first time, she had been too nervous to even do anything, with the crown prince bearing down on her, and the second time, it was too dark to see and she was in so much discomfort from the pain that she barely noticed anything else.

Rose pushed her thoughts away from bad memories and just stared at the statue. She didn't know who it was. She thought it might be the King or the late King, but Rose had seen neither of them. Still, it did look like one of the portraits she had seen in the castle—or perhaps it was just a resemblance.

She turned to Thomas, thinking to ask, but decided against it when their eyes met and he turned away. His attitude was annoying, but at the same time, compared to the anxiety she felt in the presence of the crown prince, this was very bearable.

Thomas's presence didn't make her uncomfortable or make the hairs on the back of her neck stand on end. Neither did he make her skin tingle, nor did he make her throat dry.

The carriage soon got out of the city square, and Rose heard loud noises as several interactions happened at once. Rose looked to the other side and saw they were going through the front of the market.

The marketplace was much bigger than Edenville. There were different stalls selling several items—from horses to butchered meat, grains, fruits, clothes, trinkets—the list was endless.

As she stared out, a commotion drew her attention. A couple of guards had caught a man and were pulling him away, but suddenly, the man escaped from their clutches and rushed towards the carriage. He hit it, startling Rose, who jumped back.

The guards were quick to pull him away from the carriage, bowing with solemn looks on their faces as one of them locked the man in a tight grip.

"Don't get too close to the windows," Thomas scolded as the carriage continued.

"What was that?" Rose asked.

"A thief, most likely."

Rose was shocked that he answered.

"Don't look so shocked," Thomas said, misinterpreting her reaction. "Even though Hearthgale is safe, it can't be helped that we will have this sort of situation every once in a while."

Rose didn't correct his misunderstanding. Rather, she took his advice and stayed away from the window. She thought of asking how much longer it would take, since it seemed Thomas was chatty, but she decided it was better to enjoy the thrill of it—not knowing how long the journey would be.

Chapter 218: The Wedding

"We are here," Thomas said as the carriage stopped.

Rose thought it was odd that he would announce it when it was pretty clear. She doubted the carriage would stop moving if they had not arrived.

Thomas had an impatient look as she glanced in his direction. Rose nodded in response and picked up the fruit basket. She stepped out of the carriage, which the coachman had been nice enough to open. He tipped his cap at her but didn't help her get down from the carriage.

Rose frowned as she looked outside. Where were they?

She jumped off the carriage. Luckily, the soft grass softened her landing. She adjusted the fruit basket in her hands, and the door shut behind her. Rose jerked back—Thomas remained seated in the carriage with clearly no plans to get off.

This was good, his attitude was not one needed at a wedding. Rose turned her attention away from the carriage.

The wedding was on a farm, and the carriage had stopped close to the entrance. Rose gripped the handle of the fruit basket as she walked towards it. There was a little wooden gate stopping her from going through. Rose doubted it was locked, but it didn't feel right to step past the gate by herself.

The gate was intertwined with strings of flowers. They were pale purple and had been purposefully wrapped around the wood. The gate wasn't very tall and stopped around her waist, which meant Rose could see right into the farm.

Rose looked past the gate and saw it was also decorated with flowers. There were people just past it, and they all had their attention on Rose. She suddenly felt self-conscious as she scanned the small number of people, immediately noticing that she couldn't see Edna anywhere.

Seats had been arranged and the farm was decorated for the wedding. It was a small and simple one. There was a little podium at the opposite end—a small shed covered in flowers. Rose thought it was pretty. The ceremony wasn't in full effect yet, but she could tell it would begin at any moment.

Rose shuffled on her feet as she wondered what to do. The gate wasn't locked, but she couldn't exactly walk in if she wasn't welcome, and by the looks she was getting, the people didn't know if she was welcome either.

The basket started to feel heavy, and Rose just stood in front of the small gate like a little lost lamb. Suddenly, a child bolted from the guests.

"Wait," a woman called, most likely the child's mother.

The child didn't stop running until she got to the gate. She stopped right in front of the gate. The little girl didn't look a day over six. She had a missing front tooth, her hair tied in pigtails, and she wore a pale yellow dress. She looked up at Rose with a toothless smile.

"Are you here for the wedding?" she asked softly. She had a slight lisp, but it was clearly just because she was a child.

Rose nodded.

"You don't know how to open the gate?" she asked and gently started to open it. "Even Papa thought it was locked when he got here, but it's not locked. Just pull it like this."

"Thank you," Rose mumbled.

The child nodded and reached out to grab Rose's free hand. She giggled when Rose didn't stop her and gripped Rose's hand tightly as she led the way.

"Mia!" her mother cried, rushing toward them. "What are you doing?"

She tried to lift the little girl, but Mia took a step back, hiding behind Rose. The mother turned her gaze to Rose, her expression shifting between worry and annoyance.

"Good morning," Rose said softly.

"Are you a friend of Edna's?" the woman asked coldly.

"Yes," Rose said, and she looked at her. Other than looking a little older and having different hair, she was a replica of Edna. Rose could tell this was one of her sisters—clearly an older one.

"What's your name?" she queried. "Edna didn't tell us she had such a fanciful friend." She paused and glanced toward the carriage.

"My name is Rose," she said softly, not sure how to reply to the last sentence. Rose couldn't tell if it was a compliment or not.

Mia gripped her hand tighter. "Mother," she cried, "won't you let her attend the wedding?"

Mia's mother glared at her daughter. "I didn't say she couldn't. You just don't rush toward strangers without asking who they are."

"But she's not a stranger," Mia replied. "She has red hair! Aunty Edna said she made a friend with the reddest hair I've ever seen. Redder than an apple," Mia announced with glee. "And look—her hair's so red!"

Mia giggled again, looking from her mother to Rose as if trying to ask why her mother couldn't see it. She hopped beside Rose, very excited.

"When did she tell you this?" her mother asked, clearly not believing her. Rose wondered if this wasn't the first time something like this had happened.

"Yesterday," Mia replied, still clinging to Rose. "When she gave me a red apple."

"You said your name was Rose?" she asked, narrowing her eyes as she stared up at Rose.

Rose nodded.

"The wedding hasn't begun yet. You can have a seat." She didn't seem pleased about it, but at the same time, she wasn't cruel enough to turn away someone who had come all the way here.

Rose shook her head and lifted the basket. "I don't have to stay. Just give this to Edna and tell her that—"

"I don't run errands," Mia's mother said. "If you have something to say to her, you better stay and tell her yourself. Come here, Mia, and stop bothering our guest."

Mia looked sad but reluctantly nodded and took her mother's outstretched hand. "See you later, Rose," she whispered as she was pulled away.

Rose was once again standing alone, but at least she was inside the gate and Mia's mother had called her a guest. She turned around and saw that the royal carriage was the only carriage here and was still standing where she had left it.

She turned her attention back to the wedding and took a step forward, choosing a seat just before the last one. In the case that she wasn't wanted at the occasion anymore, she could leave without drawing attention.

Suddenly, the atmosphere turned serious. "It's starting," Mia's mother said.

The groom appeared first, dressed in black. He wasn't alone—a younger man walked behind him. Rose couldn't help the smile that appeared on her face when she saw the man Edna was to marry.

He was handsome, and in some way, he reminded her of Ander—especially his gentle expression—but that was where the similarities stopped. He gave her the impression that though he looked gentle, he was not to be messed with.

His glance briefly flicked in her direction; his eyes didn't linger, and he looked back at the path. His walk down the aisle was brief. Suddenly, she heard a loud noise—Rose had been too distracted watching the groom to realize the bride was coming.

She turned her head and saw Edna in a pretty white dress. She held a bouquet, and a veil covered her face. Even with the veil, Rose could see how pretty she looked.

She gave a contented smile—she was really glad she came. Edna was such a pretty bride.

Mia walked in front of her, spreading flowers, and an older gentleman walked beside Edna with her hand around his elbow.

They walked in rhythm to the music, and Rose heard soft clapping. It didn't take long for Edna to get to her side, and Rose held her breath as the bride passed. But suddenly Edna stopped and turned her head so fast it must have hurt.

"Rose!" Edna blurted out. "What are you doing here?" she asked, bringing her voice to a whisper as she realized everyone seemed worried.

"Don't interrupt your wedding for me," Rose replied, smiling.

"Right, right," she said and turned her attention to her husband-to-be who was waiting at the front. She glanced at Rose again as though she couldn't believe her eyes.

"Someone you know?" her father whispered in her ear.

"Yes," Edna replied, shaking her head. Her voice was still filled with surprise. "I can't believe she came."

"Do you want me to throw her out?" her father asked.

"No! I'm glad she's here," Edna replied, turning to face her father. It was a little hard to see through the veil, but there was no way she would miss Rose.

"I know," he chuckled.

Edna shook her head. She had forgotten her father told dry jokes. She was still in disbelief. It couldn't have been easy for Rose to come to the wedding, but Edna was beyond glad she did. She was the only one who had come from the castle—but that wasn't the only reason she was happy.

The way they had separated had been a little sad, and Edna had worried she might never see Rose again, especially since she would be traveling with her husband. But this way... this way they could have a proper goodbye.

Chapter 219: The Bouquet

Rose watched with a huge smile as the bride and groom said their vows, pledging to love and cherish each other until their deathbed and sealing it with a kiss as soon as the groom lifted his bride's veil.

Rose clapped with a bright smile on her face. It was a wonderful wedding, but at the same time, it was hard not to think of what could have been.

Hers would have been a simple wedding too, perhaps even simpler and smaller than Edna's. She didn't have a lot of family. Her mother was the only child of old parents who had died long before Rose was born, and her father wasn't from Edenville.

Rose didn't have aunts, uncles, cousins, nieces, or nephews like Edna did. So only a few people would have been in attendance and they would be more of Ander's family.

She would have also worn her mother's wedding dress, an old white dress. Rose had always wanted to wear it since she first laid eyes on it when she was only eight.

Her bouquet would have been roses. Her mother said it suited her. She didn't know if the woman was right or wrong, but she had been named after the deep red flower.

Rose blinked away the thoughts of loss and concentrated on the wonderful moment in front of her, clapping hard at their kiss as tears filled the corners of her eyes.

After that, it was time to throw the bouquet, and Mia sought her amid the guests and pulled her out of her seat. "Join them," she cried.

No one seemed to be coming to her rescue as the little girl tried to drag her, and Mia's mother was nowhere to be found.

"Mia, I don't think..." but the rest of her words died in her throat when she saw Edna with her veil off, gesturing for her to join the ladies who were lined up in front. Some of them pushed to stay in front of others. Rose could hear the sounds of laughter and giggles even as they struggled.

She nodded and stood to her feet, letting Mia drag her. The young girl pulled her to where the other girls were and stood beside Rose. Out of nowhere, her mother snatched her away, saying, "You're too young to get married."

Mia cried as her mother lifted her, kicking out her legs, but her mother didn't hold her. Rather, she tossed her onto a huge man who grabbed her effortlessly.

"Papa!" Mia wept. "I want to catch the bouquet too."

"Not yet, Mia," her father said, tapping lightly on her back.

"But Papa," Mia cried as she rubbed her eyes. "Why can't I?"

"Don't worry. Very soon, you will. I promise."

She lifted her head and looked at her father's face. She didn't look convinced by his reply, but she surprisingly stopped crying and wrapped her arms around his neck.

"That's my girl," he said and tickled her, and she giggled.

"Papa," she cried, signaling him to stop.

Rose smiled as she watched. Suddenly, Edna's voice called out. "Are you ready?" she asked and raised the bouquet.

"Rose, get it!" Mia cheered from her father's shoulders.

"Hey!" one of the ladies in the front yelled. "You aren't even going to support your aunty?" She also had a resemblance to Edna.

"No!" Mia replied, sticking out her tongue, and everyone laughed.

"Ready?" Edna yelled in front of them.

"We are!" the ladies said and turned to face the bride.

Edna slowly turned her back to them, her train dragging across the ground. "Ready?!" she asked again as she lifted the bouquet.

"We are!"

Edna lifted her arms and tossed them backward, but it was only a feint, and complaints poured through the women gathered. Edna laughed as she lifted her hand once again, throwing it backward as hard as she could.

Rose stood behind all the women. She looked up as the bouquet floated overhead. At first, it was too far to reach, and then it was right in front of her. She didn't think—she just reached out and jumped, catching it before anyone else.

All the ladies almost jumped on her, but they stopped and hugged her instead while Mia clapped loudly from her father's shoulders.

It was dahlias, Rose mumbled to herself as she stared down at the bouquet. She had not been able to see the kind of flower they were before now.

The pale purple flowers were stacked together in the wrap and tied at the bottom. The little petals clustered to form a small, circular flower with a dozen flowers forming the bouquet. They were very pretty, and they smelled just as good.

"Congratulations," Edna announced with excitement as she saw who caught the flower. "You're going to get married next."

Rose smiled back at her, but she didn't believe Edna's words in the slightest. The bouquet catch was nothing but a game. She was stuck in a whirlpool and could only move in the direction it spun her.

After the bouquet, Edna introduced her to a few members of her family as people gathered and spoke. "The banquet will begin soon," Edna said.

"I don't think I can wait till then," Rose said when they were alone. She looked towards the guests as they huddled together and children ran all around. They looked like a tightly knit family. Rose was almost envious.

"Yes, you can."

Rose shook her head and turned towards the carriage. It hadn't moved, but now Thomas rested on it, his eyes locked on her. She had noticed him when she went up to catch the bouquet.

"I can't. I have to get back to the castle. And I believe this is yours," she whispered and started to hand Edna back the bouquet, but the latter quickly stepped back.

"I can't take that. I can't even touch it again. It will bring bad luck. It's yours now," she gave Rose a soft smile.

Rose nodded.

"Thank you for your gift," Edna said.

Rose shrugged. "It's not really mine. Mister Henry said I should give it to you."

Edna nodded and looked to her feet. "I'm glad you came."

"I'm glad I came too. You're such a beautiful bride. I can't believe I would have missed this. And I'm sorry. I never should have reacted in that manner. I was just angry, and I truly wish you a happy marriage."

Rose smiled, her eyes wrinkling at the sides. She could feel the tears just under her eyes, but she held them back. Edna might think it wasn't happy tears.

Chapter 220: A Lifetime of Love and Happiness

Edna watched Rose smile at her as she held the bouquet to her chest. She could still see the sadness in her eyes even as Rose stared at her with the biggest smile ever. She knew Rose meant every word she said, even if it was the opposite for her—until the crown prince let her go, she would never get married.

Edna knew all about her fiancé, at least enough to know just how sad Rose's situation was, and she wished she could have done something more or helped. She was married now and out of the castle, but none of them knew when that would happen for Rose.

She was surprised she had gone out of her way to come here. Edna knew it must have been hard to convince the crown prince just as it was hard for Rose to witness her wedding when hers had been cut short. She shouldn't have come but Edna was glad she did.

"You don't need to apologize. I made it more difficult for you. I should have told you much sooner. I shouldn't have left without telling you."

Rose shook her head. She wasn't angry anymore—maybe she had been in the moment—but she now clearly knew Edna's side. She was just glad she got out of the castle before the Queen plotted more evil.

She didn't think there was any reason to let her know that Lily told her about what the Queen had done, just as she was going to tell her she knew about Edna leaving weeks before she told her. Edna wanted to keep it a secret; she intended for it to remain that way.

"It is fine, really. I am fine," she said. It wasn't really a lie. "The crown prince is nicer, and I even went to the ball last night—it was wonderful."

Rose made sure to hold her smile in place because she knew if it fell, she might not be able to put it back up. There was no reason to be this sad at the wedding, but the same way she felt overwhelming happiness that Edna was getting married was the same way she felt overwhelming sadness at her own wedding that never happened.

"Really?" Edna asked excitedly.

Rose nodded but didn't say anything more on the matter. She was losing her only friend, but at least here Edna would not suffer consequences that were her fault.

"I have to go," she nodded, glancing towards Thomas, who was no longer resting on the carriage but looked like he might approach the gate.

"I can't believe he came with you," Edna whispered, following her gaze.

"He could have at least said congratulations," Rose said with a disappointed look on her face.

"What?" Edna jerked her head in Rose's direction. "Absolutely not. Knowing him, he would say something along the lines of this being the gathering of peasants and we will infect him with our peasant-ness."

Rose laughed despite herself. "You're right," she whispered.

Edna pulled her into a hug, and Rose hugged her back. Though Edna was shorter, Rose was the one being wrapped. "I wish you the best, my dear," Edna said.

Rose nodded her head and pulled away, clutching the flowers. "Lily says to give you her blessings."

Edna smiled as her eyes watered. She didn't know if she would see Rose again, but she was hopeful that she would. "Thank you, Rose," she said, not caring about the message from Lily. "Thank you very much."

Rose shook her head and started to turn away. "I should be the one thanking you," she whispered and walked to the small wooden gate.

She looked back with one hand on it. Edna's husband moved to stand next to her and waved. Mia sat on her father's shoulders, waving. "Bye, Rose," she said.

Rose yelled out, "Congratulations on your wedding, Edna. Wishing you a lifetime of love and happiness."

Rose didn't wait for a response, didn't wait to know if her words were loud enough to reach Edna—she just scurried through the gates and towards the carriage. Thomas was already inside, and he left the door open.

Rose got in, still clutching the flowers. She heard the loud sound of the door closing behind her as the coachman closed it, and she was barely seated when the carriage started to move.

Rose rested her head on the side of the carriage, still clutching the bouquet. She looked out the window and kept looking until she could no longer see the farm. "Goodbye," she whispered. It wasn't loud enough for anyone to hear, and it was more for her than for anyone else.

Rose closed her eyes as the carriage took her back. She was weirdly exhausted and didn't even have the energy for a conversation—she didn't even look at Thomas.

Thomas was also equally silent. She had expected him to say something snarky and rude about the wedding and even scold her for being late, but she got none of that. She almost smiled—she never thought he could read a room. If someone like Thomas could take pity on her, then she must be really pitiful.

Rose grabbed the bouquet tight and shut her eyes just as tight, sealing the tears in them. There was nothing to cry about. It was a wonderful occasion.

"Rose," a voice called, and Rose felt a soft tap on her hand.

She slowly opened her eyes to see Thomas bent over her. It looked like he had just stood up to get her to wake up. She blinked, and the unshed tears got caught in her lashes. How did she fall asleep?

Rose would have missed it if she hadn't been staring right at his face. It was faint, but she had seen his face get red before he turned away.

"We are here! Stop sleeping!" he said harshly and got out of the carriage.

Rose looked out the open door, and sure enough, they were right in front of the castle. She noticed that her bouquet was still in her hands even as she slept—it didn't fall off. Rose took unsteady steps out of the carriage—it was easier to step out—and rushed after Thomas.

With him leading her to her quarters, all she got were whispers and pointing. Rose was pretty used to it at this point, so it didn't matter. When they eventually got to the crown prince's wing and finally her room, Rose rushed towards it with happiness.

Without caring if Thomas waited or not, she barged right in and shut the door behind her. But as soon as she walked into the room, Rose had to put her hand over her mouth to keep from screaming out in horror.